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Irate Carter Rebuts Reagan on Military And Security Policy

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PLAINS, Ga., March 1 — Former President Jimmy Carter accused President Reagan today of "habitually" misstating the record of United States military modernization programs and of following an agenda for national security that had little chance of success.

Apparently stung by Mr. Reagan's speech Wednesday on military spending, Mr. Carter said the President was persisting in a pattern of statements "he knows are not true and which he personally promised me not to repeat." Mr. Carter's criticism of Mr. Reagan was the harshest he has made publicly since leaving office.

Informed of Mr. Carter's remarks, a White House spokesman, Ben F. Jarrett, said there would be no response.

Mr. Reagan had said that before he took office there was a decade of neglect in military affairs and that his program represented "the first significant improvement" in nuclear deterrence in 20 years.

Mr. Carter, a Democrat who lost his 1980 re-election campaign to Mr. Reagan, said in an interview here arranged at his initiative, that almost all strategic nuclear weapon programs had been started by him and Presidents Ford and Nixon and that the Carter Administration had seen a "steady and predictable" increase in spending that surpassed the best intelligence estimates of expansion by the Soviet Union.

"It is also clear that substantial improvements have continued during the last five years," Mr. Carter said, "but some of the policies of this Administration have endangered the national consensus that is necessary for sustained, efficient, and predictable improvements in the future."

The former President recalled making the decision for production of the 10-warhead MX missile and full-scale development of the advanced Stealth bomber, which will be difficult to detect by radar.

He said his own program to deploy 200 mobile MX missiles in 4,600 horizontal launching shelters provided a "feasible" basing mode invulnerable to attack and was therefore stabilizing for United States-Soviet relations.

He attributed Mr. Reagan's decision to abandon mobile basing to the objections of some "very key Republican Western states" and said the Reagan plan to put 100 MX's in fixed silos diminished Congressional enthusiasm for the missile and created an inviting target for Soviet war planners.

Mr. Carter said that his covert assistance to Moslem rebels in Afghanistan had offered at least a limited prospect of preventing a final Soviet victory there. He said Mr. Reagan's desire to support anti-Communist insurgents in areas such as Nicaragua and Angola appeared to have little chance of succeeding.

Mr. Carter, who visited Central America recently, said, "I think that Contra strength has withered away in the last year," using the name sometimes used for the American-supported guerrillas fighting the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua.

Insurgents' Numbers Disputed

Mr. Carter said there was a widespread opinion in Central America that the Nicaraguan insurgents' "enthusiasm for fighting had decreased" and that now they had perhaps four times as many troops in Honduras as in Nicaragua. He said Mr. Reagan's real goal

was not to force a negotiated settlement but, instead, "not to leave office with the Sandinistas still in power." The ultimate outcome, he said, might be the use of United States troops, "which I deplore."

He objected to Mr. Reagan's suggestions that the current program of strategic weapon modernization should be attributed to Mr. Reagan. He said that the Trident missile submarine program and a program to build a new, highly accurate Trident nuclear missile began long before Mr. Reagan took office and that five of the seven Trident missiles now at sea were installed before 1981.

Credit for Initiating B-1

He said he had canceled the program to build the first model of the B-1 strategic bomber on the ground it was less effective than the Stealth plane but that credit for initiating the B-1 belonged to Mr. Nixon and Mr. Ford. "He continues to make statements that he obviously knows are not true," Mr. Carter said of Mr. Reagan.

Mr. Carter said that when 241 American military men were killed in Lebanon in 1983, Mr. Reagan attributed it to a degradation of intelligence agencies by the three former Presidents. In a telephone conversation, "I told him he had gone too far," Mr. Carter said, adding, "He told me he had been misinterpreted by the press."

Mr. Carter said he then spoke to Mr. Reagan about his contentions that there had been no increase in military spending in the Carter years and no strategic modernization. Mr. Carter said Mr. Reagan had assured him he would not repeat these assertions.

"This is the first time I have gone public," Mr. Carter said of this interview, "but some of his statements are almost more than a human being can bear." He said the plan for a missile defense in space was technologically unfeasible as outlined by Mr. Reagan.

'Enormously Expensive'

Even an unsuccessful research program on those lines, Mr. Carter said, would be "enormously expensive." He

also criticized the concept as posing a "probably insurmountable obstacle" to achieving new arms control agreements with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Carter disputed Mr. Reagan's description of the 1979 treaty limiting nuclear weapons, never ratified by the United States, as "one-sided" and permitting Soviet cheating. Mr. Carter said the treaty had been negotiated in part by Presidents Ford and Nixon and supported by them in its final form.

He said that in 1981 he told Mr. Reagan that without the constraints of the treaty the Soviet Union could undertake a vast increase in nuclear weapons. "He said he agreed with me and intended to continue to comply with the treaty," Mr. Carter said.

Mr. Carter said his own view was that "what I always call the penultimate agreement" was the most practical approach to workable nuclear arms control. This, he said, would be a treaty to limit each side to 200 to 1,000 single-warhead missiles, based in silos deep in the southern walls of mesas where they would be safe from transpolar missile attacks, or on submarines in agreed "safe havens" in the sea, where antisubmarine warfare efforts would be banned.

The former President took exception to a passage in the Reagan speech involving the insurgency in El Salvador. He said the guerrillas' "final offensive" came in December of 1980 when he was still in office and was a "total flop." There were only about 2,000 guerrillas when he left office, Mr. Carter said, as against the "latest intelligence estimate of 6,000."

Mr. Carter said that while he was President he found persistent differences between "threat estimates" of Soviet military progress made by the Pentagon and those of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Making such estimates is a difficult art, he said, adding, "I think the Commander in Chief generally gets what he wants, and if the goal is to rapidly escalate the American defense budgets, then those are the kind of estimates he will get."